

Urban Forests

CASE STUDY

In addition to the Energy-Saving Trees Program, the Forest Service and its partners are engaged in a wide variety of initiatives to encourage tree planting in urban areas. One of those, the MillionTreesNYC campaign, was launched in 2007 as a public-private partnership to plant and care for 1 million new trees across New York City. At the outset of creating the city's long-term sustainability plan, the City of New York Department of Parks and Recreation leveraged USDA Forest Service research science to make the case to the NYC Mayor's Office that planting trees was a sound investment that would make the city more livable and therefore more attractive to residents and businesses alike. By growing the urban forest, the City hopes to cool surface temperatures, enhance public space, and help advance long-term sustainability. One of the key pivot points for public officials and decision-makers was learning that there had been scientific research on the economic and environmental value of New York City's trees conducted by the USDA Forest Service, including application of the i-Tree Eco and Streets models. NYC Parks also used the Forest Service's Urban Tree Canopy research to help provide a context for these numbers and to determine where there was space across the densely built city to plant all of these new trees.



Volunteers work during a MillionTreesNYC fall planting day in New York City. Photo courtesy of New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and Malcolm Pinckney.

Representing a transformative investment in the urban forest, more than \$400 million in municipal capital funds were committed to the tree planting initiative via the city's sustainability plan. A formal public-private partnership was formed between NYC Parks and the New York Restoration Project. Through this partnership, public funding was matched by several more million dollars from corporate sponsors, private philanthropists, foundations, and individuals that were attracted through social networks, professionalized connections, and savvy outreach and marketing of the campaign. In addition, the leaders of the campaign created an advisory committee of more than 400 individuals from 109 organizations to provide insight and guidance to the implementation of the campaign. A natural resource manager reflected on the role of this network of advisors, "I think the advisory board serves several purposes: breadth and also longevity. So, the advisory board allows us to be able to say in a very real way that it's not just about tree planting; that we want MillionTreesNYC to be about creating...an urban forestry movement for planting and care and awareness."

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MillionTreesNYC also launched a Stewardship Corps program to help educate and cultivate citizen stewards. This later evolved into the TreeLC program that offered trainings and mini-grants directly to community-based stewardship groups. Existing Forest Service research on civic stewardship was used to help support this program, as the STEW-MAP database of stewards in New York City provided a list of potential partners to MillionTreesNYC. A decision maker in a public agency noted the transformative impact of the campaign, saying “the investment we were able to make into research, the improvements to our technology, the connections that we’ve made to academia, other government agencies, and other practitioners in the field have just been extraordinary.”

In the fall of 2015, the millionth tree was planted ahead of schedule. In total, trees in New York City remove more than 38,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere each year, the equivalent of eliminating more than 6,700 cars from the road. More information on MillionTreesNYC can be found at: <http://www.milliontreesnyc.org/>.